

DETERMINANTS OF HAPPINESS AMONG THE ASSAMESE PEOPLE: A CASE STUDY OF ASSAM, INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Being shy and unhurried, happy with whatever they have, the Assamese people are supposed to be happy always. Unhurriedness and laidback temperament is the unique feature of the Assamese people. But the question arises here is that does the Assamese people really happy in their life? It seems that the Assamese people of today's generation are not happy at all with the present life. There is growing incidence of crimes, domestic violence, insurgency, ethnic clashes and growing incidence of politics of intolerance. All these show that the attitude and aspiration of the people of Assam has changed in recent years and tries to change the life style of living with the changing circumstances. Thus, under this background an attempt has been made here to find out the determinants of happiness among the Assamese people.

KEYWORDS: *Happiness, Assam, Assamese, Determinants, Logistic Regression & JEL:C5, C8, I3*

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INTRODUCTION

Being shy and unhurried, happy with whatever they have, the Assamese people are supposed to be happy always. Phukan (1985), e.g., mentioned that during medieval period Assam maintained a self-sufficient economy with either no surplus or a little surplus. He described the economic condition of Assam during that period by quoting one Assamese proverb that 'Aakal O Nai Bharaalo Nai'.¹ This quote signifies the economic condition of Assamese people during the medieval period and this is somewhat true even in the context of the modern history, polity and economy of the Assamese people. Unhurriedness and laidback temperament is the unique feature of the Assamese people. But the question arises here is that does the Assamese people really happy in their life? It seems that the Assamese people of today's generation are not happy at all with the present life. There is growing incidence of crimes, domestic violence, insurgency, ethnic clashes and growing incidence of politics of intolerance. All these show that the attitude and aspiration of the people of Assam has changed in recent years and tries to change the life style of living with the changing circumstances. Poverty, hunger, unemployment and illiteracy are now the crux of all socio-economic-political evils; and manifesting the problems of ethnic clash over the ownership of resources and to show the strength of a particular community over the other. There is also the demand for separate statehood and also for a sovereign country in the form of insurgency and separatist movement. Thus, under this background an attempt has been made here to find out the determinants of happiness among the Assamese people.

¹ The meaning of the Assamese proverb is that there is neither shortage nor surplus in the store house of the people. In other words, the proverb represents a self-sufficient economy.

Today, economists are very much concerned about happiness of the people to maximise the welfare of people and counter against the popular claim that economics is a dismal science. Thus, they are confronted with three basic questions: What makes people happy? Why people are not happy? Can happiness be derived? The happiness is a matter of subjective well-being of mankind and therefore happiness can be defined as a situation where s/he finds her/his over-all life worthy to live a meaningful, valued and dignified life without ashamed to be appeared in public. Veenhoven (1984), one of the architects of the study of happiness and economic development defined happiness “as the degree to which someone evaluates the overall quality of his or her present life- as- a- whole positively.” By degree in this definition, he tried to define a person’s real value about his/her life. It is not about an absolute value rather than it relates to the subjective well-being of mankind. Similarly, by the term overall he meant assessment about one’s life which is not restricted to a particular point of time only. Following the definition of Veenhoven, in this study happiness of the people is studied not in the context of a particular point of time, but for his/her overall assessment about their life.

Data Source

The study is based on the primary source of information and all data are self-reported. The sample size of the present study is 950 (nine hundred fifty) and collected randomly from the seven districts of upper Assam. The primary data are collected through well designed household interview schedule and through observation method. Out of the 950 respondents, it has been observed that 675 respondents (71.05 per cent) are happy with their present standard of living while 275 respondents (28.95 per cent) are not happy with present standard of living. Among the not happy respondents 99 per cent are not happy with their present standard of living because they feel that their present income stream is not sufficient to maintain a life that they would like to. On the other hand only 1 per cent claimed that they are not happy not because of their low income but because of their family problem.

Objective of the Paper

The objective of the paper is to find out the determinants of happiness among the Assamese people.

Variables Considered for the Study

The present paper is an attempt at studying the determinants of happiness among the rural people of Assam. The variables considered as the determinants of happiness are: sex, marital status, age, education of the respondent, disease, income of the respondent, family income of the respondent, type of family, personal status of the respondent and indebtedness. Existing literature suggests a positive relation between sex and happiness (e.g., Cheng and Smyth, 2014). The World Development Report, 2012 reveals that women of developed countries are happier than men, while for the developing countries it is a mixed bag. Similarly, it is also found that married people are happier than the unmarried people (e.g., Easterlin, 2005; Myers, 1999; Argyle 1999; Oswald 1997). Recent studies (e.g, World Happiness Report, 2012) also suggest that there exists a u-shaped relationship between age and happiness with lowest level of happiness in the middle age. Education is another variable that can also affect happiness of the people. One segment empirically concluded that there is no conclusive evidence that education can increase happiness (e.g., Veenhoven 2010; Helliwell, 2003; Michalos, 2008); while the other group claimed that education brings happiness (e.g., Noval and Garvi, 2010). Type of family also played major role in determining happiness, (e.g. Veenhoven (2010). Similarly, personal status of the people also determines significantly the degree of happiness among the people. For example the unemployed people are less happy as compared to the employed people having regular income (Oswald, 1997). The World Health Report 2012 indicates that

“unemployment causes as much unhappiness as bereavement or separation. At work, job security and good relationships do more for job satisfaction than high pay and convenient hours.” Indebtedness also lowers happiness among the people as the people have to take credit. An important variable we consider here is the incomes of the people. Existing literature is divided into two categories. One set of economists are of the view that there is a positive relationship between both increase in income and happiness (e.g., Wolfers, 2010). On the other hand, the other set of economists (e.g., Smith (1979); Campbell (1981)) believed that there is no linkage between income and happiness. Easterlin (1995, 2001), on the other hand claimed that higher income brings on an average happiness. However, this increase in income doesn’t always bring happiness to all. Moreover, Scitovsky (1975) stated that income will increase happiness only when it is spent wisely. Veenhoven and Hagerty (2003) after a comprehensive study concluded that there was no paradox, and countries did indeed get happier with increasing income and Easterlin (2005) in his reply maintained his earlier view and commented that his critics were using inadequate data. However, Veenhoven (2010) in his study reaffirm the Easterlin paradox which is again questioned by Wolfers (2010) and concluded that life satisfaction and the GDP growth is directly related. In a recent report on World Happiness Report, 2012, it is concluded that “happier countries tend to be richer countries but more important for happiness than income are social factors like the strength of social support, the absence of corruption and the degree of personal freedom”. Moreover, the report reveals that “stable family life and enduring marriages are important for the happiness of parents and children”. Thus, it is not clear whether there is a direct relationship between economic growth and rising happiness. Health is another variable that also influences happiness: healthier individuals tend to be happier than the unhealthy people (Veenhoven, 2008; Binder and Broekel 2012; World Development Report, 2012).

Methodology of the Study

The logistic regression model is used to find out the determinants of happiness among the Assamese people and for this the following model is used:

$$H = \ln\left(\frac{D_i}{1 - D_i}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TF + \beta_2 SR + \beta_3 MS + \beta_4 AR + \beta_5 ER + \beta_6 SO + \beta_7 IR + \beta_8 FI + \beta_9 IR + \beta_{10} HR + U_i \quad \text{---(1)}$$

Where, TF is the type of family, SR is the sex of the respondent, MS is the marital status of the respondent, AR is the age of the respondent, ER is the education of the respondent, SO is the status of occupation of the respondent, IR is the income of the respondent, FI is the family income of the respondent, IR is the indebtedness of the respondent and HR represents the health status of the respondent.

Interpretation of the Results

After specifying the model and putting the data in appropriate statistical package, the next step is to interpret the processed data. At first Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test is conducted to reliability of the model and found that the estimates of the model fit the data at an acceptable level as the estimated H-L statistic (.796) is higher than 0.05. Since the model is found to be reliable and hence the logistic regression is run and found that sex, age, occupation, personal status, family income of the respondent and health status of the respondent are the significant variable at 1 and 5 percent level of significance which are clear from the table: 1.

Table 1: Variables as Determinants of Happiness Variables in the Equation

		B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1(a)	Type of family	-.272	.246	1.218	1	.270	.762
	sex	-.618	.254	5.917	1	.015	.539
	Marital Status	-21.246	5985.236	.000	1	.997	.000
	age	.034	.007	24.194	1	.000	1.034
	Education	-.133	.067	3.891	1	.049	.876
	Occupation	-.069	.031	4.816	1	.028	.934
	Status of occupation	-.444	.177	6.255	1	.012	.642
	Income of the Respondent	.000	.000	1.494	1	.222	1.000
	Indebtedness	-.066	.285	.053	1	.818	.936
	Family expenditure	.000	.000	.309	1	.579	1.000
	Family Income	.000	.000	11.225	1	.001	1.000
	Health Status	-.584	.158	13.631	1	.000	.558
	Constant	22.658	5985.236	.000	1	.997	6919366388.386

a Variable(s) entered on step 1: Type of family, Sex, Marital Status, Age, Education, Occupation, Status of occupation, Income of the Respondents, Indebtedness, Total family Income, Health Status.

Thus, from the Table: 1, it is clear that sex, age, education, occupation, personal status, family income and health status of the respondent determine the happiness among the Assamese people. However, as a determinant of happiness unlike the other studies the role of marital status is found to be insignificant. This may be due to peaceful and cooperative nature of the couples of the traditional Assamese families. Of late, however, due to globalization and cultural sabotage from the mainland India, the situation is changed to a great extent. Domestic violence is now in this part of the land is not uncommon. At the same time, misreporting may also be possible regarding the family related problems as it involves family pride and prestige. Another important variable is the indebtedness. The present study reveals that indebtedness doesn't contribute to increase or decrease of happiness among the Assamese people. The reasons for this may be low amount of loans taken from the banks which don't increase burden on the respondent's shoulder; another may be the subsistence nature of the economy and easy going nature of the people as reflected in the proverb '*Aakal O Nai Bharaalo Nai*' which means that there is neither shortage nor surplus in the store house of the people. This is further supported by the fact that the respondents don't consider their personal income as a determinant of happiness as evident from the table: 1 that the personal income is an insignificant variable; while the family income is a significant variable that contributes to increase happiness. This may be due to the fact the respondents give more importance on family income rather on personal income. In this context, it can be mentioned that a good number of respondents are still from the joint family. Health status of the respondents also play significant role to bring happiness among them. Those people who are not suffering from diseases or not prone to frequent sufferings are happier than the others. On the other hand, since age, occupation and personal status of the respondent are significant variable and hence in the context of Assam, unemployment and poverty may be responsible for many social evils. To remove the evils such insurgency, separatist movement, ethnic conflicts, there is the need for taking immediate steps to reduce extreme poverty, hunger and unemployment by providing quality education and health care facility as well as self-employment and employment facility.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, from the present study, it is concluded that apart from household income; age, sex, health status, both occupational and personal status contribute towards increase in happiness among the Assamese people.

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